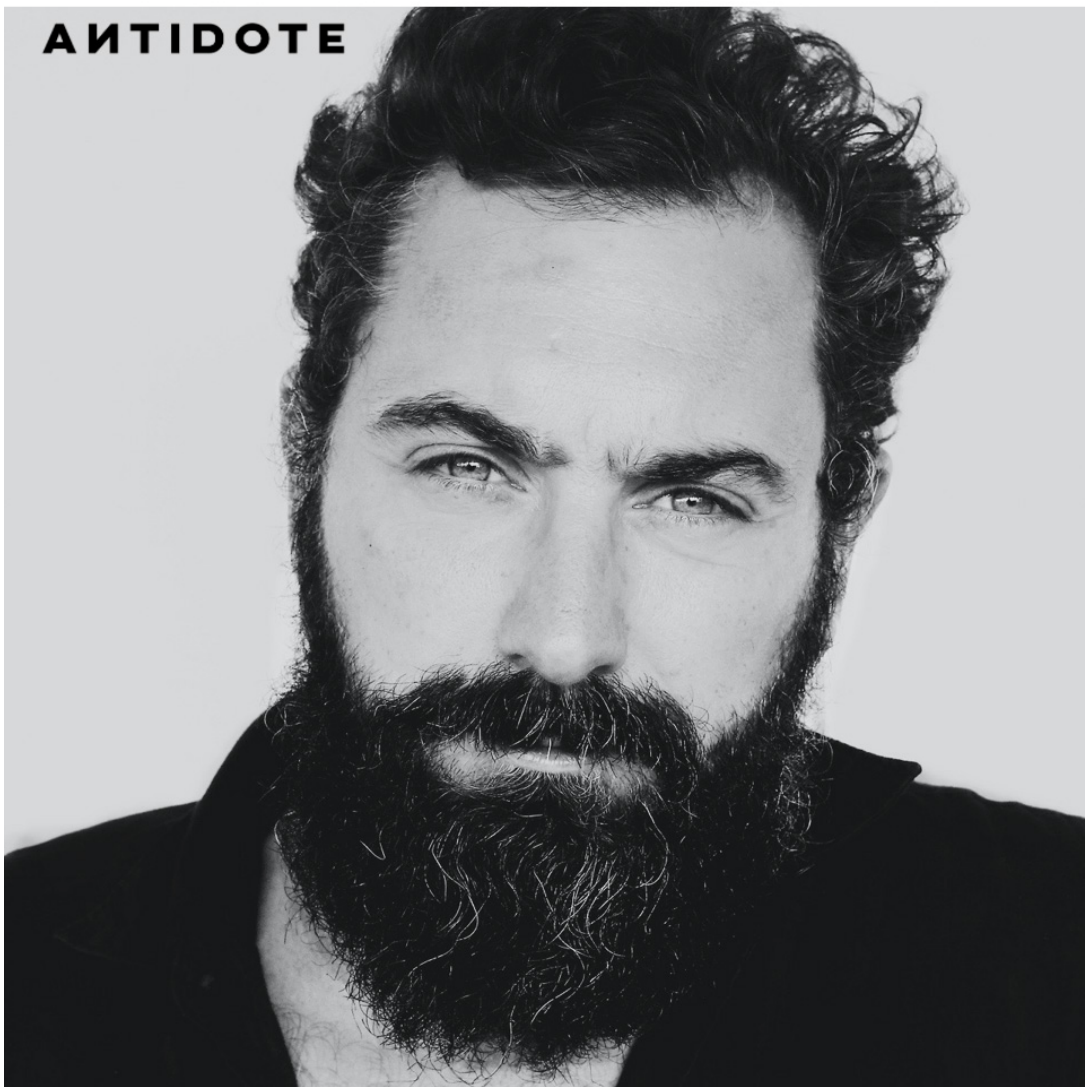


ANTIDOTE



MARCO CHIANDETTI

Marco Chiandetti is an artist of uncommon sensitivity. Working across sculpture, drawing, performance and installation, he addresses a fascination with the way humans affect the world around them; leaving traces of creativity and gestural signs of the body wherever they go. Fusing together refined artistic skill, philosophical undertones and poetic irony, he encourages his audience to think beyond the confines of conventional wisdom.

For the 2016 Biennale of Sydney, Marco produced a work titled, *'The boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins?'* Installed in the historic Mortuary Station, a former morgue, and featuring exquisite wooden cages with real Indian Minah Birds, the work was a meditation on the cycle of life and death and notions of otherness. Indian Minah Birds were introduced to the cane fields of north-eastern Queensland to combat insect pests, and are now considered pests themselves; hence providing a poignant metaphor to explore themes of migration and otherness, which are so rife in Australia.

Your work is often concerned with the impact of human life on earth. In fact, you are quoted as saying *“As human beings we are constantly adding to the fabric of the world, leaving traces of ourselves wherever we go, from the tiny to the large – even if it’s an eyelash that falls on the floor. All these things eventually build up.”* Why are you so interested in this topic?

We can’t deny that we are having a huge effect on the world we live in. Our presence is felt, and we all know now the damaging effect we have had and continue to have on the environment. So our daily actions, however large or small, have an effect of great magnitude. I think it’s really important to realise we all have an effect in the world. It’s something I meditate on a lot. So I make work where there is a cause and an effect, because I do think it’s a fundamental truth of the lives we live. So in the work I am making there is a kind of movement; either something collapses, or is squeezed, implodes, grows or gets eaten. It’s very basic but it makes sense to me.

You’ve travelled to Australia a number of times now – both for your 2008 residency at Gertrude Contemporary in Melbourne and in 2016 for the Biennale of Sydney. What is it you enjoy about working in Australia as opposed to your native Britain?

Australia is so beautiful. I enjoy the people and the landscape. That aside, I think I make my best work when I’m on the move or travelling. I’m fairly peripatetic. I enjoy going to a place and making a work that responds to something I observe about that place. The piece for the Biennale of Sydney was developed from a direct observation of something I experienced in Australia. It was very tricky to produce, we were trying to do something no one had done before, but I had full support from Artistic Director Stephanie Rosenthal and the whole team at the Biennale. We all worked very hard to produce the piece.

“I make work by just observing. If you slow down and stand back and just quietly observe the world then you can see so much, and if you learn something about the world I think it’s important to share that.”



*From left: Bullet hole series, 2014.
The boundaries which divide life and
death are at best shadowy and vague.
Who shall say where the one ends,
and where the other begins?, 2015.*

You studied with Ai Weiwei in 2005. How did this come about and what was the greatest lesson you took from that experience?

Ai Weiwei was running a workshop in Salzburg which I was at. He really taught me about accuracy; that an artwork has to be refined and very accurate or don't bother putting it in the world. He can be tough but he's a kind man. I also spent time with him in Beijing at his studio, which was wonderful.

Your work often carries quite political and philosophical undertones – whether you are commenting on the cycle of life and death or migration. Do you feel a certain responsibility as an artist to make purpose-driven work?

I don't think I'm a political artist or an activist. I think there are people that are doing this kind of work much better. I do enjoy making work that on the surface might look, let's say, very aesthetic, but as you get closer to the work, you become aware of a more philosophical or political undertone. An example of this is a series of sculptures I made in South Africa in 2014. The project involved making sculptures using an AK-47. I wanted to see if I could use the gun to create, instead of as a force of destruction. We shot bullets from an AK-47 straight into large blocks of clay. The bullets created frighteningly large cavities in the blocks, which I then cast into bronze. The end result is a series of sculptures that look very beautiful and aesthetic, but then, as you learn more about them, there's this sense of horror about what they actually are. South Africa has a very enthusiastic gun culture, it is one of the most highly ranked countries for gun related homicide in the world, and the AK-47 has almost legendary status. I wanted to try and topple all those ideas.

It's true I'm not an artist that talks about art. I also don't believe in too much theory. I think art based on theory can be problematic. I do believe you can make art that works in different ways; art that can say something about the world we live in and at the same time express something deeply personal. I make work by just observing. If you slow down and stand back and just quietly observe the world then you can see so much, and if you learn something about the world I think it's important to share that. When it comes to responsibility, I think that as an artist it's important to be accountable for what you put into the world, because it does have an effect. You have to make sure the meaning of the work is clear and that it is saying what you want to say. That accuracy is so important. It's not a conscious decision that I say to myself 'I take responsibility to make this kind of work', but maybe it's just my natural position. I'm not out to be some kind of do-gooder, all I am doing is observing a situation in the world that resonates in me for some reason and choosing to transform it into work.

“Only through making is there real understanding... I really believe that.”



The hand of the artist in bird seed, 2015.

W hat motivates you to keep making?

An inherent need to understand the world we live in. Only through making is there real understanding. I really believe that. When you make something, a 'thought' manifests physically. It's a very powerful process. You learn something about the world we live in and something very profound about the human condition. It's that depth of understanding that drives me.

What's next for you?

I'm back in Australia, researching and developing a whole new body of work which I'm really excited about. It's all very experimental, but that's the way I work. A lot of the time I'm never really sure if something will come together. I'm travelling and collecting materials. It's a deeper investigation into the body and the landscape and a kind of materiality that connects us to the earth. I'm working with a very specific species and, in a way, it's an extension of the piece I made for the Biennale.

FINAL FIVE

Favourite book? Disgrace by JM Coetzee. It's such a seminal piece

Favourite film? Come and See by Elem Klimov – probably one of the most harrowing and beautiful films about WWII

Favourite musician / band? Budd, Cage, Eno

If you weren't an artist, what would you be? Dead

If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be? For it to spin in the opposite direction. Maybe things would look and be different